

Gendia Mission, Kenya

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Tobias Okeyo Panyako holds a B.Th. from Bugema University and a post-graduate degree in Leadership from the Adventist University of Africa. He and his wife Everlyne have three children.

Gendia Mission was organized in November 1906 and was reorganized as the Kenya Lake Mission in 1963.

Origin of Adventist Work in the Area

Between 1903 and 1905, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists met and decided to send missionaries to Africa.¹ Two missionaries, Arthur Asa Carscallen and his wife Hellen Thompson, together with Peter Nyambo from Nyasaland (Malawi) who had been attending school in England, Pastor Carscallen, Grandville Canadian-born missionary, administrator and linguist in 1906 accepted a call to begin the Seventh-day Adventist work in Kenya, East Africa. After his ordination, late in 1906, he sailed for Mombasa. The three first set foot in Mombasa, which they found already occupied by Muslims. The missionaries did not settle in Nairobi, but instead proceeded to Kisumu town by Lake Victoria.²

Pastor Carscallen and his team sailed through the Lake to Kendu in Karachuonyo and landed near the home of Osumba, the son of Simba and an elderly man Luo from Karachuonyo. Osumba was one of the Karachuonyo elders, and he donated some land for the new Mission.³ Carscallen started building the church and residential houses. Later, Elder Ougo Onyango and Chief Orinda offered the land at the Gendia Hill where the first church, a wooden building with a grass-thatched roof was constructed. Having built the church and offices, Carscallen and his wife worked hard to learn the native Dholuo language. This made their work progress more quickly.

Many people left their homes to settle near the mission station's compound. Though the Gospel had reached Pare in Tanganyika in 1903, the work at Gendia proceeded faster.⁴ To begin with, there were only two young men—Isaac Okeyo Midamba and Thomas Ojiero—ready in Kakwajuok, the clan area in which the Mission Station was built. In 1906, seven young men—Samuel Dola, Daniel Aroka, John Odago, Simeon Odinda, Samuel Adhiambo, Norman Yugi, and Daudi Obuya—from Konyango, the clan next to Kakwajuok, came and accepted the faith and joined the other two men.⁵ When people realized the work of God had started in Gendia Mission, more people joined to help spread the word of God from Wikondiak, and that included John Okello, Joseph Choni, Jacob Ochwodho, David Abuor, and Isak Ogira.⁶

Two brothers also came from Kanyamfwa—Jacob Olwa and Johana Tolo—and they joined the others at Gendia. The first women who joined the Mission were Haria Marindi from Rusinga Island, Maritha Awiti, Sarah Ayaro,

Awuor Akal from Karachuonyo, and Rebeka Ogowe.⁷ Peter Gori from Kowak in Tanganyika also joined the group.

Organization History

After the establishment of the Gendia Mission in November 1906, Carscallen opened the second station in January 1909 at Wire Hill. J. J. Baker and his wife were the first missionaries at Wire Hill, commencing the work in March 1909. The following year, Carscallen opened the third mission at Gem and sent H. H. Brooks.⁸ Gem failed to work out because Brooks fell ill after only two years and had to return to England.⁹ It closed shortly afterwards. In 1912, a new mission was established at Karungu on the shore of Lake Victoria. E. B. Phillips also from England was then sent there. In 1912, the fifth station was established at Rusinga Island, and A. Watson arrived there as the first missionary. Also in 1912, the first station outside Luo Nyanza was established at Nyanchwa in Kisii. L. E. A. Lane was sent to Nyanchwa as their first missionary.

Earlier in 1911, a South African trader named Herbert James Sparks, who was an Adventist, camped at Kanyadoto and began to teach the people there. He established a church and a school although he soon left the area, paving way for Alfred Matter to take up the work in January 1913. This became the seventh mission station although only six were operational. The eighth mission, Kamagambo, was established in 1913 by Carscallen. He moved the head office of the Church from Gendia to Kamagambo.¹⁰

Early in the establishment of the missions, the European missionaries were assisted by African evangelists. In Rusinga, Watson was assisted by Daniel Onyango while at Kanyidoto, Sparks and later Matter were assisted by Mariko Otieno.¹¹ At Nyanchwa, Jacob Olwa assisted L. E. A. Lane, and in Gendia, where the work began, several evangelists were on hand to assist Carscallen. Most notable in Gendia were Isaac Okeyo Midamba and Paul Akoko Mboya. Both of them would end up in ministry with Mboya, becoming the first African ordained minister, followed by Okeyo.

The work of the Church suffered greatly due to the outbreak of World War I. All seven operational mission stations suffered a lot of vandalism and much of the property was destroyed including valuable records that were lost permanently.¹² The work resumed at various missions from 1916. Karungu and Rusinga failed to re-open after the war, and it was not until 1920 that they received new missionaries.

Administrative Development

In 1912, the new mission at Nyanchwa in Kisii developed into the South Kenya Field and is currently the South Kenya Conference. Kanyadoto Mission was moved to Ranen Hill in 1946 and was organized in 1961 as the Ranen Field and is currently the Ranen Conference. It was split in 2017 to create the Lake Victoria Field. The East Africa Union, comprising of British East Africa (Kenya), Uganda, and German East Africa (Tanganyika), was first organized in 1903 when the work started in Tanganyika. It was re-organized in the year 1921 when the union

offices moved to Gendia. The East Africa Union comprised of the Kenya Mission Field and two fields in Tanganyika—the Pare Field (under Spencer Maxwell) and the West Tanganyika Field (under William Cuthbert).¹³ By this time, W. T. Bartlett had relieved A. A. Carscallen and became the superintendent of the EAU. Bartlett remained in Kenya until 1928 when he returned to England. Spencer Maxwell took over from him in 1928.

In 1933, Maxwell moved the administrative offices moved from Gendia to Nakuru and in 1937 to Nairobi. Then in 1960, Tanganyika split to form its own Union. It was again reorganized in 1987 when Uganda became a union. The East Africa Union was again organized in 1995 to comprise Kenya, Somalia, and changed its name to Kenya Union Mission in the year 2012. The last reorganization was done in 2013 where the East Kenya and West Kenya Union conferences were created.

The Gendia Mission was reorganized as the Kenya Lake Mission in 1963. The first president of the Kenya Lake Mission was F. E. Schlehuber. It has since been organized into the Kenya Lake Conference in 2010. As of June 30, 2017, it had 709 churches with a membership of 93,153 with a general population of 2,237,462.¹⁴ It is a part of the East Kenya Union Conference.

Gendia Executive Officers Chronology

Gendia Mission: A. A. Carscallen (1906-1920), W. T. Bartlett (1920-1928), W. W. Armstrong (1929-1932), F. H. Thomas (1933-1934), A. F. Bull (1934-1935), F. H. Thomas (1935-1944), D. K. Short (1946-1952), F. Muderspach (1952-1954), F. E. Schlehuber (1954-56) L. Amayo (1957-1963).

Kenya Lake Mission: F. E. Wilson (1964-1971) Shadrack Omullo (1973-1979), Joseph Okello (1980-1989), Elijah Dulo (1989-1994), Wilson Ajuoga (1998), Geoge Okeyo (1999-2001), Harrison Ogot (2002-2005), Duncan Mumbo (2006-2009).

Kenya Lake Conference: Lewis Ondiek (2010-2011), Tobias Panyako (2012-2015), George Okeyo (2016-2018), Benson Ogayo (2019-).

SOURCES

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Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association. Various years.
<https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

NOTES

1. Personal knowledge of the author as the former administrator of Kenya Lake Mission and of Kenya Lake Conference.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. "Gendia Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1910), 119.
9. Virgil E. Robinson, *Third Angel over Africa*, unpublished manuscript, Helderberg College Library, 83.
10. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1996).
11. Ibid.
12. Robinson, 83.
13. Ibid., 103.
14. "Kenya Lake Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2018), 67.

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